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MEXICO:

Our New Opportunity

By George H. Brewer



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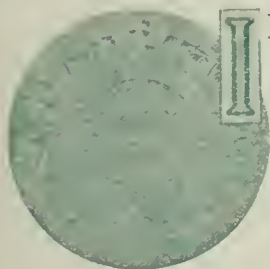


Map showing Mexico in its relation to the United States. Our principal fields are shown by the squares and outstations by the dots.

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IN PRESS dispatches Mexico's troubles have taken much space of late, and some have the impression that the situation south of the Rio Grande is practically hopeless. Fortunately the missionaries do not take their cue from the newspapers. A true missionary is an optimist every time. He has to be. He must not easily be discouraged. He must not take his eye from the objective to which he has consecrated his life. Four years of bitter strife, violent and frequent changes in government, rioting and anarchy in many places, persecutions and even death itself have not been sufficient to dampen the ardor or check the enthusiasm of those whose field of labor lies south of the Mexican border. And there is substantial reason for our faith in Mexico's future. When the present troubles are adjusted there is every reason to believe that a new opportunity will be given for evangelical work in Mexico.

Misunderstanding Between Neighbors

On the day when American troops were landed at Vera Cruz, April 21, 1914, exaggerated accounts of this event were published in extra editions of the papers of Mexico City. It was stated that American soldiers were destroying a large part of Vera Cruz; that they were killing innocent women and children and helpless old people; committing unmentionable outrages on



Hidalgo
the Liberator

Mexican citizens. There was a call to arms, and wicked and unscrupulous leaders inflamed the populace to such an extent that American citizens then residing in the capital had to flee to places of safety. So effective were the falsehoods published broadcast that all Americans were held as hostages and forbidden to leave the city. Other foreigners could leave, but Americans were denied that privilege. This bitter feeling was not because the Mexican people at heart hated the Americans, but because wicked and designing leaders purposely incensed the people, in order to create a more loyal feeling toward Huerta and his fast tottering government. The mobs, which destroyed considerable American property in the business section of Mexico City, were led in some instances by men in army uni-

forms, who were evidently sent among the people for that very purpose.

On the morning of April 24, 1914, "El Imparcial," the leading newspaper of the capital, and the official mouthpiece of the government, published an editorial, stating that the American fleet of warships in Vera Cruz harbor had turned their combined batteries on the one lone Spanish warship and had sunk it with all on board. They said that the boat, with its brave crew, had gone to the bottom, sinking beneath the waves like the setting sun behind the western horizon. It stated that the whole Spanish peninsula, together with Central and South America, were at that moment aroused with anger and bitterness toward the United States as a common enemy. It stated further that the people should cease marching up and down the streets, singing patriotic songs and waving flags and banners, because the time had come for more strenuous action, and they were told to go out as an act of reprisal and kill every American who happened to cross their path. This was the plight of the whole American colony in Mexico City and elsewhere, and had it not been for the timely assistance of Sir Lionel Carden and others of the diplomatic corps, there would undoubtedly have been a terrible massacre of innocent Americans in several parts of Mexico. Through this assistance the American missionaries and teachers of several denominations—thirty-six in number—made their escape from the country.

A Changed Front

Conditions have since changed. The feeling of bitterness toward Americans has given way to one of respect and profound consideration. The attitude of our government is now known to the Mexicans as benevolent and not hostile. Through the Vera Cruz incident they now recognize that when the United States had a chance and an excuse they did not press the advantage, but sought by every possible means to have Mexico put her house in order. The flag which they were so ready to dishonor last April has now come to mean to many Mexicans the emblem of friendship and peace.

On the other hand, the people of the United States have changed, too. We have become better acquainted with our Mexican neighbors. We are trying hard to understand the conditions under which they have lived and struggled. Hitherto most of our discussions of the Mexican situation have had to do with the externals. We have thought in military and political terms as though these institutions would ultimately furnish the solution for that country's ills. We know better now. We now know that an evolutionary process is at work in Mexico. From henceforth the people of that unhappy country will be different from what they were before. They will have a new vision of life's possibilities. They will have new aspirations, new liberties secured at great cost, and a new opportunity to take their proper place among the families of civilized nations.

The Indian Problem

The population of Mexico is said to approximate 16,000,000, of whom 43 per cent. are of pure Indian blood; 39 per cent. are mixed, ranging from the almost pure white to the almost pure Indian, while but 18 per cent. are whites and foreigners.

Of the classes enumerated above, the Indians are the most virile people, and, while they constitute Mexico's greatest problem, they also constitute her greatest hope. Nearly all the great men of Mexico and of other Latin-American countries have been Indians; among them are poets, painters, musicians, statesmen and warriors of no mean talent. Contrary to popular belief, they are a quiet, peace-loving people, industrious, and anxious to learn of better and higher things.



Growth of Democracy

For 400 years the great mass of Mexico's population has been trained to let others think and act for them. They have known but little and seemingly cared less about public affairs. A small coterie of rich land owners, a military government and a powerful clergy have combined to keep the people in ignorance of their political rights. All that is now changed; they will never again be the same. They have begun to question and investigate for themselves. They know

they have been the victims of bad government and will be the beneficiaries of good government. They want peace, but it must be peace with honor and right living conditions.

Land Question

To appreciate the physical condition of Mexico's common man, it is necessary to understand something of the so-called "Land Question."



Colima

The enormity of this problem is but little understood in this country. It is not generally known that out of Mexico's 16,000,000 inhabitants less than 8,000 wealthy families are the owners of all the agricultural lands, said to embrace about 500,000 square miles of territory. These lands are divided into immense "haciendas," or estates. There are single tracts of land owned by single families larger in extent than the entire State of New Jersey with half of New York thrown in. The Terrazas family in Chihuahua are said to possess over 20,000,000 acres of land in one solid body. Where did they get the titles to all this land? That is the question the poor ignorant Indian asks, and he has

never received a satisfactory answer. He is told that some of the titles came from the Spanish crown, given to noble families in the days of the Spanish Viceroys, running back to the conquest of Mexico. Some of these "land grants" possess titles which have been confirmed and adjudicated in the law courts of Mexico. Other titles are unproven and without doubt were acquired through unjust procedures. But all of this the poor Indian, who tills the soil and receives a mere pittance as wages, amounting to eighteen cents a day in American money, cannot understand. He wants a chance to own a farm; he wants to better his material condition. The present struggle in Mexico is only the inevitable explosion which naturally follows a too long continued repression. A steam boiler can stand just so much pressure, and when the limit is exceeded something must give way. Mexico is in a state of explosion. This upheaval is but the outward expression of the common people's demand for land and other rights which go with it.

An Energetic Middle Class

Another fact which must be reckoned with is the creation of a middle class, as yet small, but of great power. Previous to the rule of Porfirio Diaz, who gave Mexico thirty years and more of peace, there was no such thing as a middle class. There were the two extremes—the exceedingly rich and the exceedingly poor. During Diaz's

term of office factories were built, railroads were constructed, mines were opened, great enterprises were launched, and hundreds of thousands of peons were given profitable employment in the larger cities. In these centers of population, which grew with amazing rapidity, schools were established, where the children of these artisans were given a little taste of education. Many of these workmen became skilful in their particular line, and naturally were looked up to by their fellows, who sought, and are still seeking, to imitate them and better their material condition. The establishment of Protestant mission schools in nearly all of the States of the republic and the growth of Protestant sentiment have been powerful factors in building up a middle class. With the creation of this middle class there has come a demand for democracy. This middle class has clamored for a voice in the affairs of government and lawmaking bodies.

The Overthrow of Diaz

It was this irrepressible spirit of democracy which led to the overthrow of Porfirio Diaz and the advocacy of it which brought Francisco I. Madero into prominence. He wrote a book called "The Presidential Succession," which went to the bottom of Mexico's economic and social problem, and called upon the people to demand and assert their rights. It was his voice and sword which led to the revolution of 1910, which has been going on with more or less inten-

sity during the last four years, although Madero himself went down to death in the struggle after a short period of power. The underlying principles of that first revolution are those which the present leaders of the several factions proclaim. All of them seem to be agreed as to what is necessary, which, in brief, might be described as: Reforms in existing land laws; suppression of the system of "Jefe Politicos," or district political bosses, who in the days of Porfirio Diaz had even the power of life and death in their hands; suppression of the ancient peonage system, which has for many years permitted the practice of semi-slavery all over Mexico; a clearer and more sharply defined separation between Church and State, which in the days of Porfirio Diaz was allowed to become almost a dead law on the statute books.



Porfirio Diaz

Roman Catholic Influence

The Roman Catholic Church, through its leaders, secular clergy and powerful Jesuitical organizations, has made a strong effort to restore the old order of things. During the last decade of the Diaz government much favoritism was shown the ecclesiasties. Convents and monasteries were conducted in defiance of the law, church schools were

subsidized from public funds, religious processions were tolerated or winked at by the police, and they openly stated, when asked about it, that they were acting on orders from "higher up." When Madero came into power all this was changed. He was not a Protestant, but he was strongly opposed to ecclesiastical influence in politics. Naturally the sympathies of the Church were given to the revolt against Mr. Madero, and it is said that large sums of money were contributed by the clerical party to assist Huerta to maintain his dictatorship.



When Hernando Cortez came to the shores of Mexico in 1519 with his bold and intrepid band of 500 "conquistadores," he brought the sword in one hand and the crucifix in the other. These two things may be considered as emblems representing Mexico's sad history and curse from that day to this. The

sword has meant violence, misgovernment, oppression and bloodshed, while the crucifix, the wretched misrepresentation of the Cross of Christ, wielded by a corrupt clergy and unscrupulous leaders in league with politicians, has aided powerfully in Mexico's ruin. Roman Catholicism in Mexico and

other Latin-American countries must not be confounded with Roman Catholicism in the United States. Here and in other advanced countries Roman Catholicism is on its good behavior, because it has to compete with intelligent and aggressive Protestantism. The things tolerated and encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico are not practised here.

If ever a church has had an opportunity to show to the world what she could do with a nation when given a free hand, the Church of Rome had that opportunity in Mexico. She had no opposition for over 300 years. Did she "make good"? Let the facts speak for themselves. We find a people impoverished and enslaved to an oppressive feudal land system which was built up under Rome's fostering care. We find a nation steeped in ignorance, because when Church and State were separated fifty-five years ago over 90 per cent. of the inhabitants could neither read nor write. We find a people enslaved by laws and systems which the Church was largely instrumental in creating, and a standard of morals sadly out of joint with the ideals of advanced and enlightened peoples. Rome tried her hand in Mexico and failed.

Protestant Missions

There are seven evangelical denominations doing missionary work in Mexico and, fortunately, there is a growing cordiality between them. There was held in Cincinnati, on June 30 and July 1, 1914, a series of important conferences of the representa-

tives of these several bodies looking toward a better understanding as to comity and distribution of responsibility for Mexico's speedy evangelization. While all the results of that meeting cannot be foretold, undoubtedly it will have a far-reaching influence in shaping missionary policies and stimulating new work in regions hitherto neglected, and it may be said in passing that the new political complexion which Mexico will bear after the present strife is passed will be favorable to the plans proposed for closer co-operation.

Protestant missions in Mexico are comparatively new; their history goes back but fifty years. Not until 1862, after the passing of reform laws granting religious liberty and freedom of worship, did any Protestant missionary venture into the country. The first missionary to cross into Mexican territory with the message of the gospel of the Son of God was a Baptist, Rev. Samuel Hiekey, who founded the first Protestant mission in the city of Monterey, Nuevo Leon, in the year 1862. The proof that he laid the foundation wisely and well is attested by the fact that this first church still exists, and now has nearly 500 members. During the years of its existence it has sent out into Christian work more than twenty-five of its young men and women, and is to-day the strongest and most aggressive evangelical body in the republic. There are, in round numbers, in all the evangelical bodies doing work in Mexico about 100,000 adherents. Of course

not all are enrolled as members of churches, but that many people and more are now attached to our Protestant work in one way and another in its various departments of activity.

The Baptists

The two Baptist organizations—The American Baptist Home Mission Society and the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention—have contributed their share to this work. Plans are now far advanced looking toward a much closer co-operation in certain phases of missionary work between these two great Boards. There are nearly 5,000 Baptists in Mexico, with something near 4,000 children in the Sunday schools and day schools. Our own society has a well-established medical mission in the City of Mexico and the money in hand for a much needed hospital. During the enforced absence of the American missionaries and teachers the work has been carried on without interruption, save in a few cases, by the native pastors and workers. Some of them have endured hardships, persecutions and physical sufferings, but, notwithstanding this, they have remained steadfast at their posts, and our work throughout the republic is in fairly good condition, with every prospect for a substantial advance as soon as the war is over.

Type of Converts

The question is often asked concerning Mexico's converts: "Do they stick? Are the Mexican Christians to be relied upon?"

In answer to that question one can point to many thrilling experiences, one of which will suffice to answer the question:

About five years ago a young man from the hill country, just above the City of Mexico, a full-blooded Aztec Indian, descendant from the noble race which formerly ruled all Mexico, called at our Home Mission



headquarters in Mexico City and said he wanted to go to school. He came dressed in his typical Indian costume — tall straw hat,

red “zarape,” or blanket, thrown over his left shoulder, white cotton trousers, and “guaraches,” or leather sandals, on his feet. People in this country would smile to even think of such a likely candidate for the Theological Seminary. Yes; he wanted to study for the ministry, and with the knowledge of his sincere purpose he was told by the missionary that he would be sent to the school in Monterey. He remained in Monterey three years, and applied himself most earnestly to his studies. Then a call came from the little church in the hills, asking him to return and be their minister. It was decided to draw a parenthesis around the balance of his course in school and let him go to work among his people. He

returned to his people and began a most remarkable work among the villagers of the mountains of Ajusco.

With great enthusiasm he came each month to bring his reports to the missionary. Scores of souls were won to Christ, and in his own native village he was literally winning every man, woman and child to a knowledge of Christ when the great tragedy occurred. On the preceding Wednesday, when he came to tell of his work and get new supplies of literature, testaments and Bibles, he told of the dangers which were coming nearer and nearer to the inhabitants of his village. Organized bandits, under the pretext of the revolution, were committing many outrages in that vicinity. The missionary said to him: "Eustacio, why don't you come closer in and stay with us? Bring your father and mother, brother and sister in here, and remain a few days, until the danger is past." He straightened to his full height and said: "Duty calls me to remain faithful to my post. I have but one life to give, and if my Master wants me to give that I will give it. 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'" So saying, he tipped his cap and was gone through the iron gate. That was the last the missionary saw of him alive.

The Martyr Spirit

One week from that day, just as the evening prayer service was closing in the Mexico City chapel, a little Indian boy, carrying a white flag of truce, which he explained he had used in coming down the mountain to

pass through the Federal lines, announced that he had come to tell us of the death of Eustacio. They had killed him that day, and he brought the request to go and give his body Christian burial. The next morning the missionary and his wife went to Tlalpan, fourteen miles distant from Mexico City, to the foot of the mountains, where the body was brought by the remnant of the little church which had not been scattered. As they looked upon that silent form and counted the fifteen bullet marks in his breast and face, they exclaimed: "Here lies the body of just as true a martyr as was John Huss, or Latimer, or any other of the sainted martyrs of the Middle Ages."

An eyewitness hid in a stone cave nearby afterward explained how it happened. He said that when the battle first began Eustacio put his mother and family in a place of safety, and returned to the chapel to get some of his precious belongings, particularly his Bible and hymn book, and was returning to the cave to hide with the others of his family when the bandits overtook him and demanded that he drop everything he was carrying and go immediately with them. He gave one look at the bandits and another at what he carried in his arm and said: "How can I give up all these?" Then sounded a volley of shots from the rifles of the bandits, and Eustacio fell, to rise no more. This incident serves to show how deeply the gospel of Jesus Christ has affected the heart and life of some of the native Christians.

A Look Forward

The fact is that the real solution of Mexico's problems will only come when the principles of the Christian religion are applied to the lives of the people. The gospel does most for those who need most, and it will do for Mexico what it has done for other lands. With the dawn of peace in Mexico there undoubtedly will come the greatest missionary opportunity we have had on this continent for 100 years.



Juarez

Our missionaries will be back in Mexico at the earliest possible moment, but the Home Mission Society wishes to send them reinforcements, additional equipment, more workers and teachers, so that advantage may be taken of this new and favorable opportunity to help transform that land into a place of peace and righteousness.

Benito Juarez, the great reform President of Mexico, said a short time before his death that the future of his country depended upon the success of Protestant missions. He was a wise statesman, and spoke the truth. Let us hasten the consummation of his wish, which is also the desire of our Lord and Master, whose we are and whom we serve.



PRAYERS, MEANS AND MEN FOR MEXICO

By H. L. MOREHOUSE

For kindred, Country, Church, we
pray,

For distant lands in sin and woe—
Prayers rise like incense. Yet, to-day,
Where are the *prayers* for Mexico?

For fields at home, for fields abroad,
The streams of Christian giving
flow—

Most blessed streams! But, O Lord
God,
Where are the *means* for Mexico?

From papal night, turned toward the
light,
Souls, disenthralled, the truth would
know;

The hour has come! "The fields are
white!"

Where are the *men* for Mexico?

Here is our neighbor. Pass not by,
Like priest and Levite long ago;
Have pity! Help! Ring out the cry;
Prayers, means and men for
Mexico!